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How to Prepare for Windstorms

Each fall and winter season, several low pressure systems impact the Pacific Northwest, producing strong winds to 60 mph. On Columbus Day, October 12, 1962, the strongest non-tropical windstorm ever to hit the lower 48 states struck the Pacific coast. It claimed 46 lives, injured hundreds more, and knocked power out for several million people. By taking action now, you can save lives and reduce the damage caused by windstorms and other weather-related hazards.

What to do before a windstorm

Contact your local emergency management office or the National Weather Service to find out what types of storms are most likely to occur in your community.

Assemble a disaster supply kit.

Contact vendors to know the proper use of home generators.

Find out who in your area might need special assistance, specifically the elderly, disabled, and non-English speaking neighbors.

Check with your veterinarian for animal care instructions in an emergency situation.

If you live on a coastal or inland shoreline, be familiar with evacuation routes.

Know what emergency plans are in place at your workplace, school and daycare center.

Conduct a home safety evaluation, including the garage door, and nearby trees.

If you have an electric garage door opener, locate the manual override.

What to do during a windstorm

Don't panic. Take quick action to protect yourself and help others.

Turn off the stove if you're cooking when the power goes out, and turn off natural gas appliances.

If you are indoors, move away from windows or objects that could fall. Go to lower floors in multi-story homes.

If you are outdoors, move into a building. Avoid downed electric power lines, utility poles and trees.

If you are driving, pull off the road and stop away from trees. If possible, walk into a safe building. Avoid overpasses, power lines and other hazards.

Listen to your radio for emergency instructions.

What to do after a windstorm

Check yourself and those around you for injuries.

Evacuate damaged buildings. Do not re-enter until declared safe by authorities.

Call 9-1-1 only to report a life threatening emergency.

If you smell gas or hear a hissing sound indoors — open windows and leave the building. Turn off the gas source and call your gas company. Do not use matches, candles, open flames or electric switches indoors.

If the power goes out, keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to keep food frozen for up to two days.

Provide assistance to your neighbors, especially the elderly or disabled.

Try to make contact with your out-of-area phone contact, but avoid making local telephone calls.

Monitor your portable or weather radio for instructions or an official "all clear" notice. Radio stations will broadcast what to do, the location of emergency shelters and medical aid stations, and the extent of damage.